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HOW IS BRAND CO-CREATION DEVELOPING AT ADIDAS?
EXPLORATION FOCUSING ON THE RUNNING CONSUMERS
AND MANAGERS WORKING IN THE BUSINESS UNIT RUNNING AT ADIDAS

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Abstract

In the context of co-creation, this work project investigated on the development of brand co-creation within the business unit running at Adidas by analysing the relationship between running consumers and managers working in this department. After reviewing current theories on co-creation, brand identity and brand image, the result of this research shows that there is only brand co-creation at Adidas when the brand image is unfavourable. The initially high degree of brand co-creation and consumer involvement has shrunk to a minimum over time and now the most valuable consumer feedback is disregarded by the managers.

Keywords: Co-creation, Brand identity, Brand issues, Brand image

1. Introduction

In a constantly changing world, where consumers are increasingly connected and more demanding than ever before, companies are changing their approach towards consumers and integrate new business practices, such as co-creation. The concept of brand co-creation has been defined as a joint creation of value between the consumers and the brand. However, the research on brand co-creation remains limited. Currently the term is defined as “the process of creating perceived use value for a brand through network relationships and social interactions among the ecosystem of all actors” (Merz, et al., 2018). It enables the consumer to participate in the brand management together with the managers (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). The aim of co-creation is to have managers, consumers and other important stakeholders working together to build better products, better brands and a better world. Today, co-creation is emerging as a very important topic for many brands since it is redefining the role of the consumers and its relationship to a brand. Therefore, it seems interesting to further investigate this topic in the context of this thesis.

I have worked for Adidas for three years as a participant of the Dual Study Bachelor Program. After undertaking a Master’s Degree at Nova School of Business and Economics I decided to go back to Adidas. I have chosen to study brand co-creation at Adidas in the context of the running activity since I know the brand very well and I have already worked for 4 months within the business unit “running”.

Adidas is a German sporting goods manufacturer which consists of the two brands Adidas and Reebok. Being ranked amongst the world’s most valuable brands in the world, the Adidas brand has positioned itself as a global leader in the sporting goods industry in which it has been operating since 1949. The Adidas brand is presenting itself as a consumer-focused brand, which is continuously striving to improve the quality, look, feel and image of its products and organisational structures to match and exceed consumer expectations to provide them with the

highest value. To underline this vision, Adidas has integrated co-creation into their new 2020 strategic business plan as “open source”. This term is defined as a model based on open collaboration between Adidas and key external partners from different industries as well as consumers. Similarly, this means that the brand has been assuming an important role in the life of consumers specifically for those who are physically active. Since Adidas (1) is pro-actively engaging the consumers to add value to the brand (2) consumers are seeing Adidas as an important pillar in their lives, it seems relevant to use the brand Adidas as a unit of analysis to study brand co-creation over time.

One of the main drivers of Adidas’ worldwide success is created within the business unit “running”. Running has globally emerged as one of the most preferred sports activities of consumers over the past years. Therefore, this thesis investigates the development of co-creation within the Adidas business unit “running” by analysing the relationship between consumers¹ who run and managers² who work in this area and the impact of this relationship on the brand.

2. Contextual background

2.1 Definition of co-creation

The concept of co-creation has been increasingly recognized within the marketing business world as beneficial and is therefore an interesting approach for many companies. (Fuchs & Scheier, 2011; Hoyer et al., 2010; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). There are many different definitions on co-creation in the literature today, since this topic is an emerging area of research. However, there are three main approaches which build the base of co-creation. The first

¹ In the present work, we use Keller’s definition from 1993 and define consumers as those who actually use and purchase the brand (Keller, 1993).

² We use a definition of brand managers from the organizational studies field as the individuals that the consumers turn to for interpretations when predicaments arise (Ginzel et al., 1993).

approach is known as the “Service-dominant logic” (Vargo & Lusch, 2014); the second one is the “Value co-creation logic” (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000; 2003; 2004) and the third one is the “Service logic” (Grönroos, 2006; Grönroos & Ravald, 2011; Grönroos, 2012; Kowalkowski, Ridell, Røndell & Sörhammar, 2012). Although the theories are meant to complement each other, there have been discussions among researchers on the exact definition and on theoretical as well as practical implications. Taking into account that the term co-creation can be applied to any contact of a company/brand/product with consumers and other key stakeholders, almost every outcome of any contact could be assumed as co-created. Therefore, there is a need to narrow the definition of co-creation. In this work we assume that there is only brand co-creation when both parts, the consumer and manager decide to collaborate not because they are invited to but out of intrinsic motivation to improve the brand. In this case, the consumers are actively engaged with a brand because it is very important for their lives, themselves and their identity. The consumer is so involved, that they are also willing to assume the risks that are connected to using the brand. Due to the importance of the brand to the consumer and their involvement, this form of co-creation is very interesting and useful for brands.

According to the latest research (da Silveira & Simões, 2017) and based on the approaches referred to above, the following six conditions are required in order to ensure co-creation: “(1) the consumer must actively participate in the process of value creation; (2) The co-created “object” must affect the consumers’ identity and personal lives; (3) consumer involvement in dialogue with the firm; (4) information – i.e. the firm should ensure access to information to consumers; (5) collective acceptance of the risks (intrinsic to the co-created “object”) and (6) evidence of direct interaction between suppliers and consumers.”

2.2 Brand

As of today, many researchers have defined the term “brand” in their own belief and based on their experiences (Kapferer, 2008). The American Marketing Association has originally defined brand as: “Brand is a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller’s goods or services as distinct from those of competitors.” Furthermore, Ries and Ries (2000) state brand as a special term and indication which has the power to influence a consumer’s purchasing behaviour as well as a name that increases its power according to the people who know, consume and trust the brand. Keller (2008), sees the term brand in a wider perspective and explains brand in the most simple way by considering brand as a differentiator of products. To identify and differentiate a brand he has created a holistic concept of adding different dimensions to a brand which can be tangible and intangible, emotional and rational and well as symbolic brand elements. Therefore, a brand is often defined as the respective value that is added to a product; depending on the status of the brand in a consumer’s mind or simply selling the idea of obtaining a certain value attached to a brand (Kapferer, 2008).

2.3 Brand image

There are many definitions in literature, however, the most popular derives from the researcher Keller (1993) who refers to brand image as part of brand equity and the "perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory". American Marketing Association defines brand image as “the perception of a brand in the minds of persons. The brand image is a mirror reflection (though perhaps inaccurate) of the brand personality or product being. It is what people believe about a brand-their thoughts, feelings, expectations.”

2.4 Brand identity

“A brand is not the name of a product. It is the vision that drives the creation of products and services under that name. That vision, the key beliefs of the brands and its core values is called

identity. It drives vibrant brands able to create advocates, a real cult and loyalty” (Kapferer, 2008, p.171). Furthermore, the concept of brand identity is including all the attributes that makes the brand unique, meaningful and timeless. Also it comprises what managers would like the brand to be, what the brand stands for and what makes it unique (Session 1, Brand management). Many researchers have defined conceptual models to explain brand identity, including the Brand Identity Prism of Kapferer. Furthermore, brand identity can be conceptualized through dimensions: brand identity understandings and brand identity claims. Based on the definition of Gioia et al. (2010), da Silveira and Simões (2017) suggest to adopt the notions of brand identity understandings and brand identity claims to specify brand identity as follows: brand identity understandings represent what the consumer believes and interprets of the character and attributes of the brand and brand identity claims declare the statements consumers make to define a brand among each other and with external stakeholders.

2.5 Adidas

2.5.1 Development of the brand Adidas

The brand Adidas was founded in 1949 by Adolf Dassler. Struggling for a long time with the Nazi regime in Germany, the brand had its breakthrough during the World Cup in 1954 where it provided the winning German national football team with an innovative shoe tailored to the rainy weather conditions during the final match. From that point on, Adidas grew to the multinational brand that we know it today. Adolf Dassler saw the potential of the rise in football around the globe and built Adidas as a global sports brand which most consumers associated with football.

Although this strategy has developed Adidas to one of the biggest sports brands in the world the brand image became unfavourable due to this strong focus on football and caused the loss of many consumers to its main competitors. The brand was perceived in consumer’s minds as

masculine, strong and rather unattractive when it came to lifestyle and brand image, underlined by its strong focus on football and the brand colours black and white. In 2013 Adidas decided to rebrand. The brand developed a whole new strategy which went away from a single football focus and broadened the scope of the brand to other sports and communities. Besides football, research showed that running emerged as one of the most favourite sports activities and at the time was represented by a large community across the globe. A key factor to focus on the running activity was based on the fact that running products are used for sports and lifestyle. In order to turn into a more lifestyle oriented brand, Adidas decided to connect more with the consumer and build tools on how to include them into the process.

Through this tremendous change of the overall business strategy, which was based on a strong collaboration with consumers, Adidas was able to overcome the old, unfavourable brand image and today represents an innovative multinational brand, belonging to the top sports brands in the world.

2.5.2 Business unit running

Each sports category Adidas offers has its own business unit which is responsible for the process from design and creation of a product until the actual launch in the store. The business unit “running” consists of 110 employees and is responsible for the running products: footwear, apparel and accessories.

The change from the unfavourable brand image to how Adidas is perceived today, was heavily influenced by the business unit running. The strategy that has been followed for many years was to provide the best running technology to the consumers, while their competitors were more successful on selling products which were lower in terms of technology and quality but meeting the fashion trends and preferences of consumers. It was especially hard for Adidas running to reach women since the mass female consumer is more focused on the look and appeal of a product than on technology.

The shift of Adidas turning into a successful running brand as described in chapter 2.5.1 started with the strategic change in 2013 which was focusing on a mix of technology and meeting fashion requirements. The main contribution of the business unit running to support the strategy and build a closer collaboration with consumers, was to start the initiative “Adidas runners”, which supports running communities and gives managers the chance to speak to consumers, collect feedback and improvement suggestions. Through further consumer investigation, the final result showed that the majority of the shoes were perceived as unattractive, thus the responsible managers decided to change the design and adapt it to the consumers’ needs and taste. The feedback helped Adidas enormously to improve the Boost technology [Running shoe material], change their approach towards consumers and on a long term view to change the brand identity. Furthermore, the launch of the new running technology “Boost”, a unique outer sole material in cooperation with the German manufacturer BASF in 2013, is one of the main drivers for Adidas running’s success today.

Slowly, the brand could make a change in consumers’ minds to see Adidas as a brand which combines technology and fashion. The peak of success was achieved through the shoe model “Ultra Boost” which is until today the most selling shoe, not only used for running but predominantly as a lifestyle and streetwear shoe. Furthermore, Adidas running was getting more aware of the environment and started the initiative Parley for the Oceans which basic idea is to collect the plastic of the oceans and recycle it to new fabric for apparel and shoes. With this strong sense for the consumer, caring about the environment and innovative technologies, the business unit running supported Adidas to recover from its previous brand image into a young, cool and dynamic brand.

2.5.3 The running consumer

Today, there are many running consumers across the globe, of which some belong to running communities. While a part of these communities are sponsored by a brand such as Adidas or Nike, other communities are not sponsored at all.

The transformation of Adidas during the past years was strongly influenced by those running communities. The initial value proposition to connect with consumers has been created by the business unit running when they launched the “Adidas Runners”. This initiative has started in Berlin, when managers identified that there are many individual running groups who organize themselves but no sports brand is supporting them. Therefore, Adidas saw the need for supporting those communities within the concept of the “Adidas Runners”. The aim was to create a community talking about gear, mental health, nutrition and offer the consumer a holistic approach on running. The membership of the club is free and offers a wide range of running activities. Adidas provides the Runners with matching team shirts and developed tools to connect within the community. These tools are a website with different content on running and a closed Facebook group to organize themselves.

Due to the high brand awareness of Adidas, the initiative Adidas Runners was facing a huge success and went viral. A few months after the initial launch, different running groups across the globe approached Adidas to sponsor their communities too. This is how the Adidas Runners community organically grew over the years and is still growing in members and new communities every day and shifted Adidas from a brand community perspective to a consumer community perspective.

3. Addressing the work project objective

In order to define how brand co-creation develops at Adidas, it is important to understand the relationship between running consumers and managers as well as their impact on each other.

3.1 Qualitative approach

A qualitative approach is a methodology that has already been used by many researchers to study underlying reasons, thoughts or motivation of a consumer when investigating on a specific topic. Through the deep insights gained from the qualitative approach, new ideas and hypotheses can be drawn and it can provide a base for further quantitative research (May, 1997). Since co-creation is a complex process which develops over time, a qualitative approach has been chosen for this work project because it enables the researcher to tackle specific questions and topics to gain more in-depth insights. Qualitative research encompasses several tools; this work project uses the in-depth semi-structured interview as a tool. Semi-structured interviews provide participants with the opportunity to be more flexible in their answers and elaborate on topics that seem important for them to share without losing the comparability with other interviews of the study (Kleemann et. al, 2010).

3.2 Sampling and selection

The sample size of the work project consisted of 44 people, of which twelve are managers who work within the business unit running of Adidas and 32 are running consumers. The following table shows the distribution of participants within this work project:

Sampling	n
Managers	12
Consumers	18 (Adidas Runners community)
	14 (Other running communities)

Table 1: Sampling distribution

The selection of consumers has been made through diverse running groups on social media as well as contacting several runners via e-mail. The pre-selection of participants was conducted via a pre-recruiting questionnaire for consumers (see Appendix 1) and a separate pre-recruiting

questionnaire for managers (see Appendix 2) to ensure that all participants were qualified for the study according to the criteria defined in chapter 2.1.

3.3 Procedure and data collection

The pre-recruiting process as well as the conduction of interviews took place from October 2017 to November 2017. We conducted 44 interviews in total of which all were held in different locations in Germany and the Netherlands. All interviews were conducted by myself in a face-to-face discussion and took between 45 to 90 minutes. We prepared a broad interview guideline before the interview to achieve the desired outcome for consumers (see Appendix 3) and managers (see Appendix 4). Each interview has been recorded with a mobile phone and the most important sequences have been extracted. 83 running consumers started the pre-recruiting questionnaire but 49 of them had to stop their participation and were not indicated as useful for further participating in the study. Furthermore, schedule of topics to be developed has been prepared in advance to guide the participants through the interview. In order to ensure data protection, as the shared data is sensitive and could have negative effects on the respective workplace or environment, every participant was informed about the nature of the project and the fact that their data will be anonymized and never be shared with anyone.

3.4 Addressing the work project objective

3.4.1 How consumers currently engage with managers

Through the research we were able to identify three different groups of running consumers as well as two different groups of managers. All groups engage with the brand Adidas in different ways. The consumers can either belong to brand communities, e.g. sponsored by Adidas or Nike as well as from communities that are not sponsored by a brand.

The first running consumer group is identified as the “hobby runner”. This consumer group represents 10 out of 32 respondent consumers, who occasionally run and are not necessarily a member of an Adidas Runners club. The hobby runner is not attached to one specific brand and engages with many brands at the same time. When they face an issue with a product or a brand, they share their opinion in public, usually via social media or through the website directly linked to the respective brand. One of the participants described his behaviour as follows:

“I like Adidas as a brand and it reminds me of my childhood but I would not say that this is the only brand that I am wearing. In my leisure time I like to wear Nike and Asics, although when it comes to running I am addicted to my Boost running shoes [Adidas running shoe].

When I am facing an issue with a product I am sharing it of course with my friends and family so they do not buy this product as well [through social media]. Furthermore, before I buy a product, I am always looking at reviews on social media, on the website directly or I start reading through blogpost reviews about the product. For me it is very important to be honest with the brand and to make other people aware of my opinion. [...] I do not feel that I am harming the brand image with this because for me this is simply being open and sharing my honest review with my surroundings” (Running consumer, 2017).

The second consumer group consisting of 14 people out of 32 and representing the majority of participants is identified as the “ambitious runner”. This consumer group is dedicated to running multiple times a week and is an active member of an Adidas Runners group. The ambitious runners are very much involved with the brand and Adidas is a part of their identity. Therefore, they highly engage with the brand and would never share negative feedback about Adidas to external stakeholders or in public. They only share feedback within their closed community of runners. In order to convey their issues to the brand, they share their opinion with the runners who are taking the lead of the running community. We selected a statement of an ambitious runner to illustrate the process of sharing feedback:

“I am not in contact with anyone who works at Adidas directly. Actually, I would not know how to reach them since I do not have any contact details or personal relationship to any

manager. We discuss a lot about new products during our weekly runs and sometimes I can try shoes from my friends to see if they improve my running performance. I know that the leader of our group knows someone at Adidas. So what we do is to share as much as possible with him and hope that he will take our thoughts to a manager” (Running consumer, 2017).

We have interviewed eight leaders in total who constitute the third running consumer group. The leaders, that we named ‘superfans’ for the purpose of this thesis, see Adidas as a great part of their identity and have auto-selected themselves to informally take the lead of a running group. Identically to the ambitious runner, the superfans never share feedback externally but only within their trusted environment of likeminded people. Due to their high status, they collect opinions and issues within their community and try to convey those issues to the managers of Adidas. This group is the actual connection between managers and running consumers. The superfans are currently disappointed with Adidas due to the managers missing this connection with them. According to the “superfans”, the interest of the managers to strengthen the relationship and create a feedback loop is low. From the superfans perspective this fact is not taken into account. This group demonstrates a high degree of frustration since their feedback is not valued. To underline this fact, we selected three examples of superfans’ quotes:

“I was leading a running group based in Berlin which consisted of 56 runners, running twice every week. By the time there was no such thing offered in cooperation with a brand. One of my friends told me about the Adidas Runners initiative and the fact that this is a real community where people share not only running knowledge but also health tips, life tips, and were running marathons together. I have always been a big fan of Adidas and I am running in Adidas shoes, so this was the perfect opportunity for me to get into closer contact with the brand. I contacted the Adidas Runners via Facebook and one month later my running group was also belonging to the community. [...] In the beginning I was in contact with many managers who were asking me on my opinion on products as well as the look and feel of the new collection. I really enjoyed being a part of this process and felt almost as a part of Adidas. [...] Today my relationship to the managers is not the same as it used to be anymore.

They are only visiting us from time to time and it seems like our feedback is not needed anymore since the running business is going so well. I think it is a shame that this happened and I am not sure for how long I'll stay dedicated to Adidas. It is a whole different level to see how Nike is interacting with their community.” (Running consumer 18, 2017).

“Adidas was basically using us [the community] to bring the brand forward and push their success. Now we are left behind and they do not really care about us anymore. I know every single person within my running community and each of us has so much feedback to share. I think if the managers of Adidas would have insights to what we think of the products, the brand would perform better” (Running consumer, 2017).

Some superfans are not experiencing the same issue because they are connecting with managers who are much more involved. The following quote exemplifies this situation:

“I am in constant contact with the manager (name removed, in the following stated as “the manager” to protect the identity). This relationship is very unique and I am able to share a lot of feedback from my community with the manager. Whenever the manager is visiting us we are running together and give input on what we would improve at Adidas running. The manager is pro-actively contacting us and very interested in our insights. From other communities I know that this relationship is extremely rare and that we are lucky to be in contact with this manager. From my point of view this scenario should be applied across all communities” (Running consumer, 2017).

3.4.2 How managers currently engage with consumers

Additionally, to the three different groups of running consumers, we have identified two different groups of managers who engage with the consumer in different ways.

The first group consists of the majority of the interviewed managers. This group looks for consumer feedback on an irregular basis. Their only sources of feedback come from social media posts or comments on the product page of the corporate Adidas website. Managers are reading reviews on the corporate Adidas website as well as on partner websites to get an overview about issues and consumer satisfaction in general, especially during new product

launches. If there is a big issue which is mentioned multiple times over different platforms and channels, they start investigating further on it and eventually respective changes will be made to the product. As Adidas has developed a favourable brand image over the past few years, they do not feel the need to listen to consumers as in 2013. A very interesting fact is when asking the managers about their relationship with the Adidas Runners, a clear lack of communication can be observed. They visit the community from time to time to show the presence of the brand and go for a run together. During these visits there is no structured approach to gather feedback from consumers or talk about their thoughts and opinions. Although the Adidas Runners is an initiative started by Adidas and has a massive number of members, there is no structured process in place to connect with those consumers. It also seemed that the managers do not feel the need to connect with the Adidas Runners since there is already a lot of product testing done internally, therefore a second opinion is not seen to be a requirement. Therefore, the feedback that the majority of managers is gathering is unfortunately almost solely from the hobby runner, since their main source of feedback is social media or the website and neither the ambitious runners nor the superfans are share their feedback on these platforms.

The second group of managers does not behave this way and is very much engaged and interested in the consumer. This group builds the minority amongst their colleagues and is in constant contact with the “superfans” and “ambitious runners”. In order to get an overview on the whole consumer group, they also check feedback on social media and the website. In general, every manager is responsible for collecting feedback but there is no standardized process in place in order to have a structured approach for gathering consumer feedback. This implies that some managers are very much engaged and try to collect as much insights as possible but the majority gather feedback on an irregular basis and with no measurable outcome or structure.

4. Discussion

Initially the brand identity of Adidas was very technical and perceived as rather unattractive to consumers due to its strong focus on football. Obviously the aim of Adidas was to change their brand image and grow the consumer base, therefore a strategic change within the company was required. Adidas started to get more consumers involved to improve and adjust their identity and therefore change the brand image and perception of the consumers. To support the new strategy, the business unit running launched the Adidas Runners, a running community which offered a close relationship with consumers. The main contribution of this work project is to highlight that now the identity is projecting a more favourable image, the managers of the business unit running do not feel the need to listen to consumers anymore as they used to do. They simply investigate a small portion of the consumer feedback and miss a structured process on how to concretely approach the consumers. Only a minority of managers are really interested in the feedback of all consumer groups and mainly communicate with very engaged consumers on a regular basis.

We identified two different behaviours on how consumers share feedback. The first is represented by the “hobby runner”. This consumer group shows that if the involvement with the brand is very low and the consumer has no emotional attachment to one specific brand, positive and negative feedback is shared on social media, corporate websites and with other external stakeholders. This consumer does not care about the possible effects that this feedback can have on the brand but is rather focusing on sharing an honest review with its environment. The second behaviour which emerged during the interviews is represented by the two remaining consumer groups, the “ambitious runner” and the “superfan”. This behaviour is exemplified through a consumer who is highly engaged with the brand since Adidas is a part of their personality and affects their lives and community. They have much more interesting feedback to share with the managers but unfortunately they are not being listened to at the moment. This

consumer shares issues and feedback within their trusted environment and running community but never in public, so that no harm is done to the image of the brand because it would automatically negatively affect their personality and community. The ambitious runners try to convey their issues through the superfans whom in turn try to convey those to the managers. During the course of the interviews a high degree of frustration emerged since the superfans are disregarded by the majority of managers. If this relationship continues this way, the enthusiasm of the highly involved consumers can turn into a high degree of frustration which could be extremely damaging in the long-term. This work project demonstrates that the managers are not using the consumer base to its fullest potential. Due to the fact that the minority of managers who try to engage only look at feedback on social media and the corporate Adidas website, they only read the feedback of the “hobby runners” who are emotionally unattached to the brand and do not intend to add any value in order to improve the brand. Therefore, they are only getting information which does not represent the real running consumer and actually miss the feedback of the most important consumers of the running communities, the “ambitious runners” and the “superfans”. Only a minority of managers are engaging pro-actively with the running communities and try to gather valuable insights. The majority of the managers behave in this way because now that the brand is performing well again they think that they do not need any advice and the contribution from the consumer is not interesting any more.

Looking back at the initial objective of this work project “How is brand co-creation developing at Adidas?”, we can state that the initiative to start co-creation came from the managers of the business unit running who were facing the need to create a new brand identity of Adidas in order to improve the brand image. At the time the brand identity was outdated and the projected brand image was rather unfavourable. The managers were very interested in involving consumers into different processes and working together to build a new brand identity.

Therefore, they launched the Adidas Runners and started to engage with different running communities. Now that the brand image is much more favourable and the brand has become trendy, the managers do not feel the need to co-create the brand identity with the consumers any longer. As they are asked to monitor the correct brand image, they look on social media and websites to understand if there are big issues from time to time, but unfortunately only people who are expressing their opinion are the ones on social media and not the ones who have the most interesting feedback and are the least engaged consumers with no affinity to the brand. In conclusion, this work project highlights that the managers are currently not gathering any valuable feedback from the most engaged consumers.

This phenomenon is contrary to the literature on co-creation which usually suggests that the managers are far more involved. Furthermore, this process is actually far more complex than initially stated in the literature. Of course, co-creation occurs when consumers are very involved but if it leads to the fact that managers do not listen to the most engaged consumers then there is clearly a fault in the process. Moreover, there is a clear gap between brand identity claims and brand identity understandings. On the one hand when consumers are very involved with a brand but do not feel a favourable brand identity understanding they keep them as understandings but do not share this feeling as brand identity claims. On the other hand, when consumers show a low engagement with a brand, the brand identity understandings and brand identity claims remain the same.

5. Recommendations

This work project leads to useful recommendations for the managers of Adidas. Through the research we identified two main pain points: (1) Untapped potential: First, the managers need to realize the fact that they are currently gathering feedback solely from the “hobby consumers”. By disregarding the “ambitious runners” and “superfans”, they miss valuable feedback from

the most engaged consumers who are passionate about the brand. Keeping in mind that these consumers had a great impact on improving the brand when it was in its crisis, the managers should get more involved with those consumers again to exploit their feedback to the fullest potential.

(2) Lack of structure and process: In order to use their resources to the fullest potential the managers must categorize the different consumer groups and indicate the added value of their feedback to the brand. It is very important to evaluate the feedback of all consumer groups and to create a structure on how to approach each consumer group. This implies not only looking at social media or the corporate website from time to time but following a structured approach. Based on the three consumer groups that we have identified through the research the managers should mainly concentrate on the “ambitious runners” and the “superfans”. Within the process, managers should visit the Adidas Runners communities at least once every quarter to establish a good relationship. Facing the issue that most of the consumers expressed their frustration about the current situation, the managers should try to make consumers feel valued again. We believe that they should start with identifying the superfans, who show the highest involvement with the brand by claiming Adidas as a part of their identity. The managers are currently missing out on gathering feedback from them which is the most valuable feedback since it summarizes the thoughts of a whole community. In order to reverse frustration, the superfans should receive a reward for their engagement. We recommend to invite them to the global headquarters in Herzogenaurach, Germany twice a year while Adidas plans the Fall/Winter and Spring/Summer collection for the upcoming season. Of course, confidential information cannot be shared but the managers receive important feedback in order to adjust the products according to the consumers input and needs. Furthermore, when visiting the Adidas Runners, the managers should try to build a closer relationship with the community by organizing events such as round tables or workshops around running topics. Taking into consideration the large number of

running communities across the globe, the responsibility for each community should be assigned to different managers.

In conclusion, it can be stated that Adidas needs to implement changes towards their approach on consumers. This process will take time and dedication but we strongly believe that following the recommendations based on our research would improve the overall business.

6. Work project limitations

While conducting the research, we faced some limitations.

1. Traditional limitations of a qualitative research i.e. a small sample which is not totally representative. However, we believe that the deepness of the findings wouldn't have been possible without this methodology.
2. A real longitudinal research would've been even better because we would have been able to interview same people multiple times and therefore measure the evolution of the relationship with the brand over time. However, the time constraint of the work project did not provide us with this opportunity. Therefore, we were only able to measure the evolution of the relationship with the brand through retrospection within this work project.
3. Respecting the time and 25-page scope limit of this work project we only studied the business unit running out of many business units within Adidas. In order to have a holistic overview on how brand co-creation develops within Adidas it is very important to understand the process within the other business units.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Pre-recruiting questionnaire – Consumers

Pre-recruiting questionnaire - Consumers

The interview is part of a research project from NOVA School of Business and Economics about your running activity and will take about 40 minutes. I don't anticipate that there are any risks associated with your participation, but you have the right to stop or withdraw from the research at any time. Your identity and everything you say will be anonymized so that you cannot be identified and care will be taken to ensure that other information (as direct quotations) during the interview that could identify yourself is not revealed.

FILTER 1: Do you run at least once every 4 months?

➔ Consequence: YES continue NO stop interview

FILTER 2: I am going to show you a list of brands: could you please tell me which of the brands you know at least the name?

(Nike, adidas, Under Armour, Puma SE, Reebok, ASICS, Converse, Fila, New Balance, Vans, Mizuno Corporation, Champion, Umbro, Brooks, Saucony, Kappa, Lotto, Fred Perry)

➔ Consequence: ADIDAS continue NO ADIDAS stop interview

FILTER 3: Can you please tell me which of these brands have you used for your running activity?

➔ Consequence: ADIDAS continue NO ADIDAS stop interview

FILTER 4: You told me that you are using the brand [depending on answer] for your running activity. Could you please tell me if you have once connected directly or indirectly with any of the mentioned brands, if yes with which ones? Examples: Email, phone, Post on Social media, participation on running events sponsored by the brand

➔ Consequence: ADIDAS continue NO ADIDAS stop interview

Appendix 2: Pre-recruiting questionnaire – Managers

Pre-recruiting questionnaire – Managers

The interview is part of a research project from NOVA School of Business and Economics about your running activity and will take about 40 minutes. I don't anticipate that there are any risks associated with your participation, but you have the right to stop or withdraw from the research at any time. Your identity and everything you say will be anonymized so that you cannot be identified and care will be taken to ensure that other information (as direct quotations) during the interview that could identify yourself is not revealed.

FILTER 1: Do you work at Adidas for more than two years?

➔ Consequence: YES continue NO stop interview

FILTER 2: Do you work within or have you worked recently the business unit running?

➔ Consequence: YES continue NO stop interview

Appendix 3: Interview guide – consumers

Interview guide – Consumers

Warm-Up:

The interview is part of a research project from NOVA School of Business and Economics and the running department of the adidas Group and will take about 40 minutes. I don't anticipate that there are any risks associated with your participation, but you have the right to stop or withdraw from the research at any time. Your identity and everything you say will be anonymized so that you cannot be identified and care will be taken to ensure that other information (as direct quotations) during the interview that could identify yourself is not revealed.

Topics to be developed:

Initial relationship with the brand within the context of the running activity

Initial question: Can you tell me about the first time you used Adidas within the context of your running activity?

Shared opinion about the brand within the context of the running activity

Initial question: When you talked about Adidas to others, what did you say?

Reaction on issues

Did you ever faced any issues when using Adidas running products?

Current relationship with the brand

Initial question: Now, what do you deeply think about Adidas today?

Appendix 4: Interview guide – managers

Interview guide – Managers

Warm-Up:

The interview is part of a research project from NOVA School of Business and Economics and the running department of the adidas Group and will take about 40 minutes. I don't anticipate that there are any risks associated with your participation, but you have the right to stop or withdraw from the research at any time. Your identity and everything you say will be anonymized so that you cannot be identified and care will be taken to ensure that other information (as direct quotations) during the interview that could identify yourself is not revealed.

Topics to be developed:

Initial relationship with the brand within the context of the running activity

Initial question: How did you happen to work for Adidas in the running department?

Shared opinion about the brand within the context of the running activity

Initial question: When you talked about Adidas to others, what did you say?

Interaction with consumers

Do you interact with consumers?

Current relationship with the brand and issues

Initial question: Now, what do you deeply think about Adidas today?